

## SCORCHED EARTH AND LAND MONOPOLY IN MALAYA

SPEAKING OF the situation in Malaya, the *Manchester Guardian* of 27th January stated: "The scorched earth policy can never be as effective in a lush, tropical country like Malaya as over the wide expanses, bitterly cold in winter, of China or Russia. And it is not possible to destroy Malaya's main sources of wealth, namely, the tin ore in the earth and the millions of rubber trees on the estates."

On the other hand the Financial Editor of the same paper on 5th January said: "It is now confirmed that the tin-smelting works of the Eastern Smelting Company at Penang—a subsidiary of Consolidated Tin Smelters—were completely destroyed before the British forces withdrew. That will prevent the Japanese from using the tin mines which they have occupied in Thailand and Malaya, as their own smelting capacity is not large. But for the Allies the loss of this great smelter raises a difficult problem of future tin supplies." This article also states: "The loss of the Penang smelter, to which must now be added an imminent threat to the Singapore smelter of the Straits Trading Company, at any rate by air bombing, will greatly intensify the refining difficulties. These two plants used to refine before the war nearly one-half of the world's tin supply, and since the outbreak of war their importance has further increased. Shipment figures though not an exact guide, indicate that nearly two-thirds of the Malayan tin-smelting operations have been carried out at Penang and slightly more than one-third at Singapore."

These facts underline the quotation in *Land & Liberty* for January, from Mr Hobson's article in the *News Chronicle*, which stated that the tin-smelting works of Malaya had for 38 years been enjoying a virtual monopoly through the operation of the export duty of £60 per ton, on ore exported to countries outside the British Empire.

On 15th January the *Manchester Guardian's* Financial Editor pursued the subject in these striking words: "Sometimes illusions breed greatness, at other times they foster foolishness. This is a moment when we can well afford to do away with one particular illusion that has survived the disaster of Malaya. It is not only the defence glacis of Singapore that we have lost. With it has gone, probably for ever, one of the greatest springs of wealth in the Empire."

In the same article the Financial Editor of the *Manchester Guardian* proceeds: "There are reports that the Japanese are offering the British rubber estates that have fallen into their hands to the Malayan workers on a co-operative basis. That is probably no more than a trick to get the labour back to the plantations, but it may well make a sufficient impression on the population to impede the reopening of many estates when the Japanese have been forced out of the country. The native population will, of course, suffer hardship as soon as their stocks of rice are used up, for rice is their staple diet and most of it has to be imported. The Japanese, who are extremely short of rice at home, are not likely to spare much for the Malaysians."

In a previous article in the *Manchester Guardian* on 8th January, the same writer had these comments: "The Japanese advance into the chief tin-producing areas of the world has made it necessary to develop alternative sources, of which a small but useful one exists in this country. . . . Before the sudden extension of the war these resources had been neglected. In March, 1940, the Minister of Supply appointed a commission to inquire into the possibility of increasing the output of non-ferrous metal mines in the United Kingdom. The findings have never been published, but they seem to have been negative." Notice that even in war-time there was no encouragement to produce; also that the facts confirm the existence in this country, as elsewhere, of unworked natural resources that the consumers of every country are crying out for. We are also told that the tin mines in this country have been closing down because of the shortage of labour and the Government's decision not to grant further financial assistance, nor to extend to them the "wasting-assets" relief, all of which, the writer says, "suggests, that it has not been thought necessary to encourage lead mining in this country."

Still quoting from the *Manchester Guardian*, we read: "The Cornish tin mines, although worked for well over 2,000 years, are still able to supply something like 3,000 tons of tin a year. In 1935 and 1936 the output exceeded 2,000 tons, but in 1939 and 1940 it was only about 1,500 tons a year, and it is safe to assume that it was further reduced in 1941. In the new circumstances it would certainly be worth while to obtain an extra 1,500 tons of tin a year at home." The writer goes on to speak of the by-products of tin working, which are so valuable, and of the lead resources which also could be greatly stimulated.

Here we have another reminder, if we have eyes to see, of the Economic Law of Rent. The resources of the earth vary in their richness, accessibility, and other factors. Tin, as we have seen, can be produced, and smelted, in many parts of the world, and apparently, most economically, apart from monopoly manipulations, in the Malayan peninsula. This is not, however, an argument for closing down tin mines in Cornwall or in other countries. The Cornish mines have been satisfying some needs for ages before the war, in spite of the richer mines in the East. The true lesson is to base our taxation upon a right understanding of the law of economic rent. To remove taxes on industry and trade, whether in Cornwall or Malaya, to make trade free, and to destroy land monopoly at home and in all our dependencies and colonial possessions by appropriating the economic rent, or land value, for public purposes.

It is stated in the issue quoted: "What damage has been done to the physical property of both tin and rubber companies is at present unknown. The damage to rubber trees may well be serious enough to require a long resting period, even apart from actual destruction." The *Manchester Guardian* writer, on 9th January, said,

"The sudden danger to our Eastern rubber supplies has found this country unprepared for the production of synthetic substitutes and short of equipment for reclaiming used rubber." We may compare this with the statements of a writer in the *New Statesman* of 3rd January, who points out that only 7 per cent of the rubber consumption in this country is reclaimed, as against 38 per cent in the United States. In fact, he states, rubber waste is actually being sent across to U.S.A. to be reclaimed there. The personnel of the Rubber Control Board, we are told, is composed of members of the plantation production trade, and the reclamation of waste rubber is in the hands of associated firms. Thus the reclamation industry is linked with plantation interests who are concerned to increase consumption of crude rubber and not used rubber.

The *New Statesman*, on 17th January, returned to the subject: "Talking of rubber," they said, "the United States is now being forced to spend one hundred million pounds on synthetic rubber, and even in this country we shall have to start rubber reclamation and use the synthetic article if we are to run our motor cars. Once again economic imperialism and big business monopolists have dug their own grave. In order to keep up prices they have not kept large stocks and they have restricted output and refused to permit rubber reclamation. Well, now the Japs have the rubber and we shall have to become independent of these interests."

"Scorched earth" and "fifth columns" are slogans which this war has produced. But in peace time and in the economic developments which have led up to the great cataclysm, it has all along been the "scorched earth" policy that has been in operation in the restriction upon production which is everywhere the Landlord's Law and of which every vacant site and valuable land "held for a rise" is an example. This pernicious institution has also its "fifth column" in the pretenders who ever attempt to attribute poverty and unemployment to other causes. If not positively then by implication they defend the land monopoly or excuse it. The campaign is deliberate and can be seen in every direction; to-day it is nowhere so obvious as in the voluminous articles and speeches on the so-called planning, with all the wonderful things that "planning" would do, which ignore or are silent about the fundamental fact that the price of land and unjust taxation stand in the way. It is a propaganda to be denounced, for these apologists cannot and will not lead a war-infested and poverty stricken world out of its distresses.

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